

## RANDOMLY MODULATED BOOSTED FEATURE AREAS FOR SLOT MACHINES

### TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present disclosure relates to operations of a gaming machine within a gaming environment.

### BACKGROUND

[0002] Slot-type electronic and/or mechanical gaming machines, often also referred as slot machines, are popular fixtures in casino or other gaming environments. Such slot machines are generally controlled by installed software programs. Aside from slot machines, various other kinds of gaming devices, including electronically-assisted gaming tables are also generally controlled by installed software programs. Generally, the installed software programs are stored in secured memory devices housed in secured cabinets and executed by secured processors and/or other programmable hardware also housed in the secured cabinets. The displayed outcome of each round of gaming action (e.g., spinning and settling of on-screen virtual reels) often remains relatively static. After prolonged play, gamers may become bored by monotonous display of the same basic game template (e.g., three displayed rows of five vertical reels and one horizontal payline) over and over again.

[0003] It is not only the gamers who directly interface with the gaming machine who may become bored. Various types of further people can surround each gaming machine. Participants in a gaming environment may include not only the one or more primary players who are directly using the slot or other software driven gaming apparatuses in front of them by engaging with external user inputs (e.g., buttons, touch screens). They may include one or more locally adjacent players who are similarly directly using locally adjacent slot or other software driven gaming apparatuses but can see the gaming action on the machines next to them. The participants may also include adjacent bystanders (e.g., players' friends) who are standing nearby (e.g., over the shoulder of) the primary players and nearby passers-by who happen to be passing by in an area where they can view part of the gaming action(s) of one or more of the slot or other software driven gaming apparatuses including displays of so-called, attractor advertisements.

[0004] One prior art solution to avoiding boredom occasionally activates a boosted features zone among the horizontal rows and columns of the on-screen reels. More specifically, the Ainsworth Rumble Rumble™ slot game provides a boosted features zone of fixed size and shape. The boosted features zone appears as overlaid to cover pre-defined parts of the displayed rows and columns of the on-screen reels. When a special-feature symbol such as a WILD card symbol lands by chance inside the fixed-size/shape zone, normal aspects or features of such a special-feature symbol are "boosted" to thereby allow for winnings above and beyond normal winnings expected for such special-feature symbols. For example, a normal Wild card symbol may enable a winning substitution (e.g., completion of a winning cards hand) only for the one position it lands on. On the other hand, if the same Wild card symbol appears inside the fixed-size/shape boosted features zone, that special-feature symbol may spawn additional features (boosted features) such as replicating itself into more positions on the displayed array of vertical reels and horizontal symbol rows.

This boosts the chances that the player will win something from the given spin. When free spins are awarded by the Ainsworth Rumble Rumble™ slot game, the displayed array of vertical reels and horizontal symbol rows grows in size, thus allowing for an even greater extent of boosting. However, the boosted features zone remains of fixed in size and shape.

[0005] Another prior art solution is found in the Konami Celestial Moon Riches™ slot game. It also provides a boosted features zone (also referred to as a "strike zone"). Size and shape of the boosted features zone is predetermined and depends on the amount the player wagers prior to each gaming action (e.g., each pull of the spin activating lever). The more the player bets, the greater the size of the boosted features zone. The predetermined size and shape may be defined by a lookup table (LUT) that has amount of wager as its input.

[0006] It is desirable to add further entertainment and excitement for players in games where a boosted features zone appears.

[0007] It is to be understood that some concepts and ideas provided in this description of the Background may be novel rather than part of the prior art.

### SUMMARY

[0008] Various embodiments in accordance with the present disclosure generally relate to generating boosted feature areas of different sizes and/or shapes and/or locations based on chance and alerting players and bystanders of such changes when they happen.

[0009] In one embodiment, a machine-implemented method is carried out for a slot machine where the method comprises: (a) detecting initiation of a current gaming action on the slot machine; (b) responsive to the detection of initiation of the current gaming action, determining by chance at least one of a size, shape and location of a boosted features area to be used for the initiated current gaming action; (c) determining if a special-feature symbol is landing inside the determined boosted features area of the current gaming action; and (d) applying a corresponding boosting for the special-feature symbol that is determined to be landing inside the determined boosted features area of the current gaming action. In one embodiment, the machine-implemented method further comprises: (e) determining if the determined boosted features area of the current gaming action is different from a boosted features area used in a gaming action immediately prior to the current gaming action; and (f) responsive to determining that determined boosted features area of the current gaming action is different, generating at least one of display, sound and haptic effects that draw attention to the difference.

[0010] Other aspects of the present disclosure will become apparent from the below detailed descriptions.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0011] The present disclosure may be better understood by reference to the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, which illustrate particular embodiments in accordance with the present disclosure.

[0012] FIG. 1A illustrates a gaming system and environment including a wager-based gaming machine in accordance with the present disclosure.